Highlights on The Meaning of

Al-Fatiha,

the Opening Chapter of the
Muslims' Glorious Book, Al- Qur'an
By

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<u>*Al-Fatiha,*</u>

To the Memory of my Sister,

May Allah Bless Her Soul

Acknowledgements

I first would like to thank Allah for helping me write this little book on the great 'Sura Al-Fatiha'. I pray that He will forgive me for whatever mistakes I might have made. It is a modest attempt to approach a great task. I wish my readers will correct me where they find me wrong.

I would like to thank Professor Muhammad Ibrahim, Department of African languages, at Faculty of Languages and Translation, Al-Azhar University for reading and putting some useful remarks on the first draft of this booklet. He also loaned me some books on the subject. May Allah bless and reward him.

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Preface

The first chapter of the Qur'an, known as "Al-Fatiha" is essential to the proper understanding of Islam, the religion for around two billion people. This chapter or sura is only seven short verses; yet, it includes the basics of Islam and introduces the Muslims' conception of God. The sura starts with praise of Allah for being so kind and merciful. Muslims thank Allah for being the Lord of all human beings, without any discrimination or favoritism. As the sura indicates, Muslims do not believe that they are a chosen people or a favored nation. They think of Allah as the Lord of beings. They believe that Allah is a God of Justice as well as of love. Hence Islam is presented in this sura as a religion of balance that can function forever.

The first three verses of the chapter explain the reasons why Muslims thank, praise and worship Allah. He is the fair and merciful god in both this life and the one after. When a Muslim understands the fair and loving nature of God, he gets into a direct relationship with Him. Hence, in Verse Five a Muslim addresses Allah using the pronoun "You,", rather than "He", to point out the direct relationship between Allah and human beings.

Verse Five and Verse Six use the collective pronoun "we" rather than the first person singular pronoun "I" to indicate that a Muslim should think collectively and should be concerned about his fellow human beings as well.

Religion, from a Muslim's point of view, unites human beings. A Muslim, thus, prays not only for his own reformation, but also for the reformation and betterment of all the members of the human race.

The seven short verses of Sura Al-Fatiha, thus, deal with the three important basics of Islam, belief, worship and conduct. When a Muslim believes that Allah is a God of mercy and justice, he worships Him lovingly and dutifully. With this love and sense of duty in mind and at heart, a Muslim disciplines his life and acts according to the instructions of his fair and loving Creator.

Working on this little book on Sura Al-Fatiha, I referred to several important interpretations of the Qur'an. Some of these interpretations, like At-Tabari's were written over a thousand years ago. Some other interpretations used here were written by distinguished contemporary writers, as Ash-Shaarawi and Shihata.

I do not claim that this booklet offers a complete explanation of Sura Al-Fatiha, but I only hope that it will throw some light, however slight, on the important short sura under consideration.

Such attempts to understand the real message of the Qur'an are necessary for presenting the true image of a good Muslim to non-Muslims and non-Arabs. It will bring believers together, in an attempt to heal the breach between cultures. This book, which addresses both Muslims and non-Muslims, attempts to explain the true message of the religion of Islam. It comes to the conclusion that Islam is a religion of justice and love. It is the religion, which unites people and brings them together in the love of their Benefactor.

Salah Nefeily, Cairo. August, 2004.

Al-Fatiha, the Opening Chapter

of the Muslims' Glorious Book Al- Qur'an.

سورة الفاتحة

﴿ بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ١ ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٢
ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ٣ مَٰلِكِ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ٤ إِيَّاكَ نَعۡبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ
نَسۡتَعِينُ ٥ ٱهۡدِنَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمَ ٦ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنۡعَمۡتَ
عَلَيۡهِمۡ غَيۡرِ ٱلۡمَغۡضُوبِ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ٧ ﴾

Sura "Al-Fatiha"

In the Name of Allah, the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate. (1) All praise and thanks be to Allah, The Lord of all beings. (2) The All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate. (3) Master and Possessor of the Day of Judgment. (4) You only do we worship, and You only do we beseech for help. (5) Guide us to and keep us on the right way. (6) The way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your Grace and Favors, not of those who have incurred Your wrath or those who have gone astray. (7)

Introduction to 'Al-Fatiha':

The short chapter known as 'Al-Fatiha' or 'The Opening Chapter' of the Qur'an is so named because it is the first chapter of the Qur'an and the key to the understanding of the whole Book. It is a seven-verse chapter or sura, which is described by the Prophet Muhammad as the greatest sura of the Qur'an (Al-Bukhari Vol. 6: 490). In his daily five prayers, a Muslim reads it at least seventeen times. In prayers, it has to be read in Arabic even by non-Arabs (Al-Bukhari Vol.1: 404). This probably explains why it is a very easy sura to read. It does not include many recitation rules. However, the sura is so rich that Ali Ibn Abi Talib, cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, said: "I could fill up to seventy volumes in explanation of Sura Al-Fatiha" (Ibn Ajiba 629). Ath-Thaalibi quotes one of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in which the prophet states that the like of the Opening Chapter of the Qur'an has never been revealed to any of the prophets before him (Vol. 1: 1).

Writers agree that the verses of the Sura Al-Fatiha are seven. However, they disagree about the division into verses of the beginning and the ending of the sura. The most acceptable view is that the initial statement, "In the Name of Allah, the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate" counts as a separate verse in this sura only. In other suras of the Qur'an, this statement is not counted as a separate verse. It seems to be an initial statement that starts the Qur'an and which is repeatedly quoted before reading all the suras of the Qur'an except for

Sura 9, At-Tawba. This notion is held by Ash-Shafiy and is based on the Prophet's statement that sura Al-Fatiha is seven verses and the first verse is "In the name of Allah the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate" (Al-Baydawi Vol.1: 3). Abu-Hanifa, another great scholar, holds the other view which states that the verse "In the name of Allah, the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate' is not a verse by itself. The last verse of Al-Fatiha, from Abu Hanifa's point of view, is "Not of those who have incurred Your wrath or those who have gone astray" (Ar-Razi Vol.1: 163).

Sura Al-Fatiha is given many names, which indicate its nature. It is known as 'the treasure' for it includes all the elements of righteousness and truthfulness. It is also known as 'the protective sura' for it includes all the basics, which guarantee that a person will live rightly and be saved in the After-life.

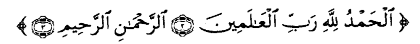
Al-Bay'haqi quotes Al-Hasan who said "whoever understands the meaning of Sura Al-Fatiha, will know the meaning of all the books revealed to the prophets and messengers of Allah. It sums up the Qur'an and the Qur'an sums up all the books revealed to the prophets and messengers before the prophet Muhammad (Assyoti Vol.1: 18).

Al-Fatiha establishes the foundations of Islam, which are detailed in the Qur'an. It deals with the basics of 'belief,' 'worship' and 'conduct'. The first three verses deal with belief in Allah and His attributes. The next two verses deal with the worship of Allah. The last two verses

deal with the practical aspect of a Muslim's conduct. These three parts of the sura are related to each other. When a Muslim believes in Allah as the God of mercy, he realizes that he should thankfully worship Him. A Muslim, will, then, follow the instructions of Allah and will discipline his life accordingly.

Al-Fatiha might also be divided into two equal sections. The first section is a praise of Allah and the second is a supplication to Allah to Guide human beings to the right way. It is a supplication, which gets an immediate response from Allah. It is recommended that we read the sura's verses separately so that we enjoy Allah's response to each of the verses, as Omar Ibn Abdel Aziz, the great Muslim leader, used to do. The Prophet Muhammad narrates that Allah responds bountifully to the verses of Al-Fatiha. When a Muslim reads the first part of the chapter, Allah will say: "My servant has praised, thanked and glorified Me". When a Muslim reads the second part of the chapter, which is a supplication to Allah to guide him to the right way, Allah will respond positively to the supplication

The feature of the inclusiveness of Sura Al-Fatiha is noticed by Ibn Ajiba who points out that this sura includes different kinds of knowledge. It deals with theology in the two verses:



"Thanks and praise be to Allah, Lord of All beings. The All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate".Information about the After-life is included in the verse:

﴿ مَٰلِكِ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ٤ ﴾

"King and possessor of the Day of Judgment". Religious rites are included in the verse:

﴿ إِيَّاكَ نَعۡبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسۡتَعِينُ ٥ ﴾

"You only do we worship" and religious submission is included in the verse "You only do we beseech for help". History and teachings taken from past nations are referred to in the verse:

﴿ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ غَيۡرِ ٱلۡمَغۡضُوبِ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ٧ ﴾

"The way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your Grace and Favors, not of those who have incurred Your wrath or those who have gone astray".

As quoted by Ibn Ajiba, Al-Ghazali refers in his book Renovation of Theology, to the inclusiveness of the sura. He says: "If you read:

﴿ بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ١ ﴾

'In the name of Allah the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate' you will understand that all life is owing to Allah. You then will realize that you will thank and praise Him for being the loving and compassionate God He is. When you read:

﴿ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ٣ ﴾

"the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate," you will realize that He is so Merciful in this life and in the after-life. You will think of Him as:

﴿ مَٰلِكِ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ۝٤ ﴾

"the Master and Possessor of the Day of Judgment". Once you realize that He is so loving and compassionate you will attest to His right to be worshipped. You will say:

﴿ إِيَّاكَ نَعۡبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسۡتَعِينُ ۝٥ ﴾

"You only do we worship". You will also realize that you need His help and support to worship Him, and so you say: "You only do we beseech for help". You will also realize that you need to be in His companionship and seek the way, which brings you closer to Him. You ask Allah to lead you to the right way, the shortest way to Him. You ask Him to keep you away from the way of those who have incurred His wrath or those who have gone astray.

﴿ ٱهۡدِنَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمَ ۝٦ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ غَيۡرِ ٱلۡمَغۡضُوبِ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ۝٧ ﴾

(Ibn Ajiba 629-30).

In his detailed interpretation of the Qur'an, Ar-Razi relates the seven verses of Sura Al-Fatiha with the seven movements performed in a Muslim's prayer. He bases his notion on the verses 14 and 15 of Sura 87, which go as follows:

﴿ قَدۡ أَفۡلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّىٰ ۝١٤ وَذَكَرَ ٱسۡمَ رَبِّهِۦ فَصَلَّىٰ ۝١٥ ﴾[سورة الأعلى]

"Indeed whosoever purifies himself (by avoiding polytheism and accepting Islamic Monotheism) shall achieve success (14). He is also saved who glorifies the Name of his Lord and properly performs his prayers".(15) Ar-Razi explains that a Muslim starts his prayers in a standing position which corresponds with the first verse of Al-Fatiha,

﴿ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴾

"In the Name of Allah, the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate". A person feels strong when he thinks of Allah's mercy and compassion. The second verse

﴿ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

is a verse of thanking and praise, so it fits the position of kneeling down to Allah. Verse Three

﴿ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴾

"The All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate" which emphasizes the meaning of the first verse, corresponds with the position of standing, for we feel strong when we feel the mercy of Allah, as is the case with verse One. Verse Four

﴿ مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴾

is a reminder of the Day of Judgment, a horrendous situation which is fit for prostrating oneself to Allah, the Master of that Day. Verse Five,

﴿ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴾

"You only do we worship and You only do we beseech for help" is a combination of both glorification of Allah and of His mercy, so it fits the position of sitting. When the person asks Allah to guide him to the right way,

﴿ ٱهْدِنَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾ ﴾

he prostrates himself in modesty so that Allah may accept his prayers. The last verse

﴿ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ ٱلْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ﴿٧﴾ ﴾

is a reminder of Allah's blessings to the good and of His punishment of the sinners. This situation fits the middle position of sitting. A person will then be ready to pronounce his greetings to Allah and to His messenger, Muhammad (Vol.1: 220).

Ar-razi also finds some correspondence between the seven verses of Sura Al-Fatiha and the seven stages of the Prophet Muhammad's ascendance to heaven where he paid his devotion to Allah with the words "Greetings and prayers to Allah," a statement which also ends a Muslim's prayer (Vol. 1: 220). Al-Fatiha is thus seen by Ar-Razi as a spiritual ascendance to the presence of our Lord.

Ar-Razi finds another correspondence between the number of the verses of Sura Al-Fatiha and the number of the doors of Paradise. He says that Paradise has eight doors. The first is that of knowledge which corresponds with the statement of seeking refuge in Allah. Muslims are requested to say this statement before they read Al-Fatiha or any part of the Qur'an. In Sura 16, Allah says:

﴿ فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ فَٱسْتَعِذْ بِٱللَّهِ مِنَ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ ٱلرَّجِيمِ ﴾

[النحل:٩٨]

"So, when you want to recite the Qur'an, seek refuge with Allah from Satan, the outcast and cursed one" (Verse 98). The seven verses of Sura Al-Fatiha, according to Ar-Razi, correspond with the seven remaining doors of paradise. These seven doors of paradise are those of remembrance and glorification of Allah, thanking, hope, fear of punishment, sincerity, invocation and emulation. Each of these doors corresponds, as Ar-Razi says, with one of the verses of Sura Al-Fatiha.

In his book The Opening Chapter of the Qur'an and the Prophet's Last Sermon: A Study and Analysis Muhammad M. Mansour explains that Al-Fatiha comprises many aspects of Islam. It refers to some of the attributes of Allah and to man's duties towards his creator. (16) Al Fatiha introduces Allah to readers as a loving God of mercy who cares for His creation. As a sign of His mercy, Allah sent His prophets and His books to human beings for their own good. Abud-Dardaa, as quoted by Assyoti, said that Sura Al-Fatiha overweighs the rest of the Qur'an (Vol.1: 16).

Al-Fatiha, according to Mansour, introduces the religion of Islam to readers. It includes reference to the way of righteousness and of truthfulness. It is the way, which Islam came to revive. It is the duty of a Muslim or a righteous person to thank Allah and to praise Him for the great blessings He has bestowed on him. The other duty of

the righteous person, according to the sura, is to worship Allah alone. Allah is the One Whom we seek for help and support. Allah also requests that human beings should ask Him for help. Verse 60 of sura 40 urges Muslims to request Allah's help and blessings. It reads:

﴿ وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ٱدْعُونِىٓ أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِى

سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾ ﴾ [غافر: ٦٠]

"And your Lord said: 'Invoke Me and I will respond to your invocation. Those who do not invoke Me out of pride, will surely enter Hell in humiliation". Al-Fatiha, as Mansour explains, teaches us how to ask Allah for help. Such supplication and invocation should be preceded with praise of Allah and with thanks for His blessings. (22)

The whole Qur'an, in this sense, might be read as a kind of explanation of Al-Fatiha. Verse nine of Sura seventeen says:

﴿ إِنَّ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ يَهْدِى لِلَّتِى هِىَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ

ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٩﴾ ﴾ [الإسراء: ٩]

"Verily, this Qur'an guides to that which is most just and right and gives glad tidings to the believers who perform deeds of righteousness, that they shall have great rewards in Paradise" (17: 9).

Scholars disagree about the time and place of the revelation of Al-Fatiha. Some writers say that Al-Fatiha is a Meccan sura. Others say that it is a Medinian sura. Some

other writers say that part of it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca and part of it was revealed to him in Medina. (Al-Qurtobi Vol.1: 1) Ibn Kathir quotes some writers who say that Sura Al-Fatiha was revealed twice, once in Mecca and once in Medina (Vol.1: 3). Abdallah Shihata says that it was the first full Sura revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (11). Al-Qurtobi quotes Amr Ibn Sharhabil who tells the story in which Khadija, wife of the Prophet Muhammad, advises him to go to Waraqa Ibn Nawfal to tell him about Gabriel and about his first revelations. The Prophet told Waraqa that he hears some voice which seems to follow him and that he used to flee from the voice. Waraqa asked him to stay and see what the angel would tell him. Mohammed followed the advice of Waraqa. Later on, Muhammad told Waraqa that the angel came to him and asked him to repeat Sura Al-Fatiha after him. (Al-Qurtobi Vol.1: 1). This story is used to prove that Al-Fatiha is a Meccan sura.

Ibn Kathir quotes the Prophet Muhammad who said that Gabriel told him that he has been given two bonuses which have not been given to any prophet before him. They are Srua Al-Fatiha and the last verses of Sura Al-Baqara. (Vol.1: 3). It should be noticed here that the last verses of Sura two (Al-Baqara) are in many ways similar to Sura Al-Fatiha. The last three verses of Sura- Al-Baqara go as follows:

﴿ لِّلَّهِ مَا فِى ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ۗ وَإِن تُبْدُوا۟ مَا فِىٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوْ
تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُم بِهِ ٱللَّهُ ۖ فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَآءُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ

كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾ ءَامَنَ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِن رَّبِّهِۦ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَۚ
كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِۦۚ
وَقَالُوا۟ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَاۖ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾ لَا يُكَلِّفُ ٱللَّهُ
نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَاۚ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا ٱكْتَسَبَتْۗ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَآ إِن
نَّسِينَآ أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَاۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَآ إِصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ
مِن قَبْلِنَاۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِۦۖ وَٱعْفُ عَنَّا وَٱغْفِرْ لَنَا
وَٱرْحَمْنَآۚ أَنتَ مَوْلَىٰنَا فَٱنصُرْنَا عَلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿٢٨٦﴾ ﴾

[البقرة:٢٨٤-٢٨٦]

To Allah belong all that is in heavens and all that is on earth, and whether you disclose what is in your ownselves or conceal it, Allah will call you to account for it. Then He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills. Allah is Omnipotent (284). The Messenger (Muhammad) believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. Each one believes in Allah, His Angels, His Books, and His messengers. They say, 'We make no distinction between His messengers'—and they say, 'we hear, and we obey. We seek Your Forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the return of all' (285). Allah burdens nobody

beyond his scope. A person gets reward for the good, which he has earned, and he is punished, for that evil which he has done. Our Lord! Punish us not if we forget or fall into error. Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which You did lay on those before us. Our Lord! Put not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Pardon us and grant us Forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Patron (and protector) and support us against nonbelievers" (286).

The first of the thiee above quoted verses from Sura Al-Baqara attests to the fact mentioned in the second verse of Sura Al-Fatiha, that Allah is the Lord and possessor of all Beings. The same verse emphasizes the fact that Allah will be the sole Judge on the Day of Resurrection. This is the same idea mentioned in verse 4 of Sura Al-Fatiha:

﴿ مَٰلِكِ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ٤ ﴾

"Master and Possessor of the Day of Judgment". The next verse 285, of Sura Al-Baqara explains verse five of Sura Al-Fatiha:

﴿ إِيَّاكَ نَعۡبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسۡتَعِينُ ٥ ﴾

"You only do we worship and You only do we beseech for help". The verse from Sura Al-Baqara explains the meaning of worshipping Allah. It emphasizes that a Muslim should believe in what was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad as well as in the prophets before him. The verse explains that Muslims will not only believe in the

instructions of Islam, but they will also put this belief into practice. The last verse of Sura Al-Baqara stresses the attribute of mercy, which is emphasized in Al-Fatiha. Allah says that He does not burden a person beyond his ability. This last verse of Sura Al-Baqara ends with supplication to Allah, very much like Sura Al-Fatiha.

It is also important to note that Al-Fatiha speaks for all Muslims and probably for all human beings. It does not say 'guide me,' but "Guide us". The Qur'an, which follows Al-Fatiha, is an explanation of the right way, which Muslims ask Allah to guide them to. We should also note that the last sura of the Qur'an is entitled /An-Nass/ or 'Mankind'. This last sura, very much like the first one is concerned with mankind or people at large. It emphasizes the idea of seeking refuge in Allah from the devil, which "whispers at the hearts of mankind". The two suras indicate that the religion of Islam is not concerned with the good of its people only. It is rather concerned with the good of the whole race.

Al-Qur'an, The Muslim's Glorious Book:

It is the book, which Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad as a guide for humanity. It is described by Allah as

﴿ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ ﴾ [البقرة: ١٨٥]

"guidance for Mankind" (2: 185) and as the book that leads "Mankind out of darkness (of disbelief and polytheism) into light (of belief in the oneness of Allah and Islamic Monotheism)" (14: 1).

﴿ الٓر ۚ كِتَٰبٌ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ ٱلنَّاسَ مِنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ ﴾

[إبراهيم: ١]

The Qur'an was communicated to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. The Qur'an covers almost all aspects of human life and includes so many historical facts, which enlighten readers about past nations. Mujahid said that Allah loves most those who are most knowledgeable and acquainted with His book Al-Qur'an. (Fat'hel-Qadir Vol.1 :1). The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in portions over a period of twenty-three years (Thirteen years in Mecca and ten years in Medina). The language of the Qur'an is beautiful and its wisdom is admirable. The verses revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca are known as Meccan verses and the ones revealed in Medina are known as Medani. Many of the Meccan verses and suras deal with the foundations of the religion whereas the Medani verses and suras deal with

human relations, including social, political and economic aspects.

Before reading the Qur'an a Muslim is recommended to seek refuge in the presence of Allah to protect him from the devil and other distractions. The reader of the Qur'an should purify his mind to receive Allah's words. A reader will then be able to understand some of the secrets of the divine words of Allah. He will be in the companionship of his creator. It is mentioned in the Qur'an that the devil himself challenged Allah saying that he will delude people except those who are honest to Allah. It is known that the devil does not delude the sinners for they are already following him. He said that he will always be there to dissuade people from doing good. On the Day of Judgment, Satan and his followers will disavow their relationship to the sinners. They will dissociate themselves from their followers and will be concerned only with themselves.

Man is empowered and protected when he takes refuge in Allah. Prophet Muhammad said that Allah will save whoever devotes himself to the service of his Lord (Ar-Razi Vol.1: 127). When the Prophet Muhammad and his companion Abu Bakr were in the cave on their way to Medina, Abu Bakr feared that the Meccans would catch them. The Prophet calmed Abu Bakr down and told him that they are in the protection and refuge of Allah and that Allah will not disappoint them. Allah saved them from the Meccans who did not notice their presence in the cave. This is the rule, which Allah applied to all the nations

before Islam. He saved Noah and Jonah when they directed their faces to Allah seeking help.

It is important to note that the Qur'an is miraculous on different levels. In sura 6, verse 38, Allah says:

﴿ مَّا فَرَّطْنَا فِي ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مِن شَيْءٍ ﴾ [الأنعام: ٣٨]

"We have neglected nothing in the book (The Qur'an)". It is the book, which Allah promises to "protect and guard from corruption" (Sura 15: 9).

﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا ٱلذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ٩ ﴾ [الحجر: ٩]

Allah challenged non-believers to come up with a book similar to the Qur'an. Verse 88 of Sura 17 reads:

﴿ قُل لَّئِنِ ٱجْتَمَعَتِ ٱلْإِنسُ وَٱلْجِنُّ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يَأْتُوا۟ بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِۦ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا ٨٨ ﴾ [الإسراء: ٨٨]

"Say if the whole of Mankind and Jinn were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support". Allah challenged them to come up with ten suras equal in power, beauty and perfection to those of the Qur'an (Sura 11, verse 13).

﴿ قُلْ فَأْتُوا۟ بِعَشْرِ سُوَرٍ مِّثْلِهِۦ مُفْتَرَيَٰتٍ وَٱدْعُوا۟ مَنِ ٱسْتَطَعْتُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ١٣ ﴾ [هود]

When they failed to meet this challenge, Allah challenged them even to come up with one sura, equal to

any of the suras of the Qur'an. In Sura Two of the Qur'an, Allah addresses non-believers saying:

﴿ وَإِن كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّن مِّثْلِهِ
وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُم مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (٢٣) ﴾ [البقرة]

"And if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down to Muhammad, then produce a sura of the like thereof and call your witnesses besides Allah, if you are truthful" (Verse 23). This challenge to come up with only one sura is repeated in Sura 10, Verse 38 of the Qur'an. The non-believers' failure to meet the challenge proves that the Qur'an is a great and an everlasting miracle from Allah to support his prophet Muhammad. In his book The Qur'an, the Miracle of Miracles, Ahmed Deedat quotes the words of R. Bosworth-Smith in his book Mohammad and Mohammadanism in which he describes the Qur'an as "a miracle of purity of style, of wisdom and of truth" (14).

On the scientific level, Deedat gives the example of the newly discovered theory of the 'Big Bang' to support the truthfulness of the Qur'an. Deedat points out the fact that this story of the 'Big Bang' is told fourteen hundred years ago in verses 30 and 33 of Sura 21. The first verse reads

﴿ أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا ۖ
وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ ۖ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٣٠) ﴾ [الأنبياء]

"Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation) before we clove them asunder". Verse 33 continues:

﴿ وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلَّيْلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ وَٱلشَّمْسَ وَٱلْقَمَرَ ۖ كُلٌّ فِى فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾ ﴾ [الأنبياء]

"And it is He (Almighty Allah) who created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon: All (the celestial bodies) swim along, each in its bounded course".

Deedat also refers to the newly discovered fact that life began to generate as a "protoplasm out of which came the amoeba and out of that mire in the sea came all living things. In one word all life came from the sea, or Water" (20). This theory was mentioned in the Qur'an:

﴿ وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ ٱلْمَآءِ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ حَىٍّ ۖ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾ [الأنبياء: ٣٠]

"And we made from water every living thing. Will the atheists and the agnostics, then, not believe!" (21: 30). Verse 45 of Sura 24 reads:

﴿ وَٱللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَآبَّةٍ مِّن مَّآءٍ ﴾ [النور: ٤٥]

"And Allah has created every animal from water".

Another writer, Professor Mansour Hassab el-Naby writes in detail about the most recent theories about human reproduction. He explains that the Glorious Qur'an presents these theories in the most accurate way (142-163). He refers to the fact that human reproduction is so miraculous that Allah speaks about it right in the second

verse revealed to the prophet Muhammad. The first sura revealed to the prophet starts as follows:

﴿ ٱقْرَأْ بِٱسْمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ۝ خَلَقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝ ﴾ [العلق]

"Read, in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher who created Man. He created Man out of something, which clings (96: 1-2). The Qur'an includes so many other scientific facts, which are discovered only in the last few decades. Tantawi Johary explains that the verses dealing with science in the Qur'an are more in number than the verses which deal with matters of religion. He points out that about seven hundred and fifty of the Qur'an's verses deal with scientific facts related to the different aspects of life (37). As a matter of fact, if we review the verses of the Qur'an, which speak about the creation of Man, we will notice remarkable accordance with the newly discovered facts. Verses 12 through 14 of Sura 23 for example, read as follows:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِن سُلَٰلَةٍ مِّن طِينٍ ۝ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَٰهُ نُطْفَةً فِى قَرَارٍ
مَّكِينٍ ۝ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا ٱلنُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا
ٱلْمُضْغَةَ عِظَٰمًا فَكَسَوْنَا ٱلْعِظَٰمَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَٰهُ خَلْقًا ءَاخَرَ ۚ فَتَبَارَكَ
ٱللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ ٱلْخَٰلِقِينَ ۝ ﴾ [المؤمنون]

> And indeed We created man out of an extract of clay (12). Thereafter, We made the offspring of Adam as a mixture of the drops of the male and female sexual discharge and lodged it in the woman's womb (13). Then,

We made this mixture a piece of thick coagulated blood. We, then, made this clot a little lump of flesh. Out of this lump of flesh, We made bones. Then, We clothed the bones with flesh. We, then, brought it forth as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Great Creator (14).

In his commentary on these three verses of Sura 23, Yusuf Ali points out that these verses are miraculous in their reference to the minute details of the process of the creation of a fetus, when an inorganic matter becomes a living matter. Ali wrote:

The first change in the fertilized ovum is the conversion into a sort of clot of thickly congealed blood; the zygote cells grow by segmentation; then the mass gradually assumes shape in its growth as a fetus. From the lump develop bones and flesh and organs and a nervous system (2872).

It is also remarkable that a saying of the Prophet Muhammad goes even into more details than those mentioned in the verses. It gives the time of forty days as the period which each of the three stages takes before life develops into the fetus. According to the prophet's saying the three stages of developing the fetus, are:

1) Nutfa, a mixture of the drops of the male and the female sexual discharges.

2) Alaqa, a clot or a piece of thick coagulated blood.

3) Mudgha, a lump of little flesh.

The verses quoted above from Sura 23 also state the scientific fact that bones are created before flesh. These facts are scientifically discovered lately. These facts told in the Qur'an and in the sayings of the unlettered Prophet Muhammad attest to the fact that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

The Qur'an is also miraculous in its prophecies. It foretells many events, which happened after the revelation. The Muslims' defeat of the Romans is predicted in Sura 30 verse 2-5. The victory of Muslims in the Battle of Badr and the opening of Mecca are also foretold in the Qur'an. (Eigaz El-Qur'an Vol. 1: 3). Al-Qur'an includes stories about past nations and prophets about whom the Prophet Mohammad had no idea. The Qur'an is also miraculous in the way it is so rhetorically phrased. The prophet who was himself illiterate, could not by any means compose a book so rhetorical as the Qur'an.

The Qur'an played and continues to play a major role in the life of Muslims. Ali Ibn Abi Talib narrated that he had heard the Prophet Muhammad say: "There will be a time of seditions for Muslims". Ali asked the prophet: What is the way out of these seditions? The Prophet answered:

The way out of the dilemmas of that hard time is a return to the Book of Allah, the Qur'an. It is the book that tells about the stories of past nations and the tidings for the next ones as well as the right way for your own generation.

... Whoever gets away from it will suffer, and whoever uses it as a guide, will prosper. It is the strongest of attachments to Allah. It is the book of wisdom and of truthfulness. It is an endless source of knowledge and miracles. It is not affected by whoever attacks it. It is the guide for all human beings and a source of truth for its readers. Whoever follows its instructions will be rewarded and whoever uses it as a guide will be always fair." (Shihata 5).

The Qur'an is not only a book to read, but an endless source of wisdom and instructions. Verse 24 of Sure 47 entitled "Muhammad" reads:

﴿ أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَآ ﴾ [محمد]

"Do the unbelievers not then think deeply in the Qur'an or are their hearts locked up from understanding!". The aim of this great book is to urge people think profoundly about life and act accordingly. The Qur'an is considered by Muslims as the main source of law and guidance in almost all aspects of life. Verse twenty-nine of Chapter thirty-eight describes the Qur'an as follows:

﴿ كِتَـٰبٌ أَنزَلْنَـٰهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَـٰرَكٌ لِّيَدَّبَّرُوٓا۟ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْأَلْبَـٰبِ ﴾

[ص]

"This is a Book which We have sent down to you (Muhammad), full of the blessings that your people may ponder over its verses, and that men of understanding may remember its basics and rules". The whole Qur'an is an

explanation of what the right way is. In the Qur'an Allah says:

﴿ يَٰٓأَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ قَدۡ جَآءَكُمۡ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمۡ كَثِيرٗا مِّمَّا
كُنتُمۡ تُخۡفُونَ مِنَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَيَعۡفُواْ عَن كَثِيرٖۚ قَدۡ جَآءَكُم
مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ نُورٞ وَكِتَٰبٞ مُّبِينٞ ﴿١٥﴾ يَهۡدِي بِهِ ٱللَّهُ مَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ رِضۡوَٰنَهُۥ
سُبُلَ ٱلسَّلَٰمِ وَيُخۡرِجُهُم مِّنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ بِإِذۡنِهِۦ وَيَهۡدِيهِمۡ إِلَىٰ
صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ ﴿١٦﴾ ﴾ [المائدة]

> Indeed, there has come to you from Allah a light (The Prophet Muhammad) and a plain Book (The Qur'an). It is the book that guides all those who seek Allah's Blessings and His ways of peace. Allah will bring them out of darkness by His Will unto light and will guide them to the Straight Way (5: 15, 16).

In the Qur'an, Allah promises that he will protect this book from any change or alteration. He said

﴿ إِنَّا نَحۡنُ نَزَّلۡنَا ٱلذِّكۡرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾ ﴾ [الحجر: ٩]

"Verily, We have sent down the Qur'an and surely We will guard it from corruption" (15: 9).

The first verses of the Qur'an (from Sura Al-Alaq, The Clot) were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad while he was performing his religious devotion in Cave Hiraa in Mecca. He was forty years of age at the time. Muhammad

was so much confused and frightened at the time that he did not know what to do. He went to his wife, Khadija, who comforted him and took him to her relative, Waraqa Ibn Nawfal, the knowledgeable priest. Waraqa knew that Muhammad will be the prophet of Allah.

The Prophet himself was very keen regarding putting the Qur'an into writing. He used to have the scribes of the Qur'an close to him so that they record whatever revelation he had. The prophet told the scribes about the exact position of every revealed part in the Qur'an (Al-Gioshi 5).

Since the early days of the revelation, Muslims did their best to keep the Qur'an unchanged. They memorized it, studied it and recorded it in writing. During the life of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims had copies of parts of the Qur'an both for reading and for study. Al-Gioshi gives the story of the early conversion of Omar Ibn El-Khattab, the second Caliph, as an undeniable proof of the writing of the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet's life. When Omar was told that his sister had converted to Islam, he went right away to her house where he heard her rehearsing Sura Taha (Chapter 20 of the Qur'an), which was put into writing. Omar asked his sister to hand him the leaf on which this sura of the Qur'an was written. She bravely refused to hand him the leaf unless he promises to revere it and to wash himself first. Omar read this part of the Qur'an and soon he converted to Islam (Al-Gioshi 5).

The Qur'an is preserved in book-form since the days of Othman, the third caliph who collected it in what is

known as the Othmanic Qur'an. Four of the seven copies sent by Othman to the different countries of the world are still available, one in each of the following cities: Medina in Saudi Arabia, Cairo in Egypt, Istanbul in Turkey and Tashkend, in Uzbakestan, as Professor Zaghloul An-Naggaar says in his lecture on the Miracle of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is also preserved at the hearts of millions of Muslims who recite it in their prayers and congregations as well as in their private devotions.

In fact, so many situations, in the well-documented history of Islam, tell us that a good number of the Prophet's companions kept the whole Qur'an by heart. Many more companions memorized parts of it. Logically, those companions could not memorize the whole Qur'an or parts of it without written texts. At least four people from Medina had full copies of the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet's death (Al-Gioshi 7). The Prophet used to send copies of whatever revealed to him to the early migrants to Abyssinia (Al-Gioshi 6). Ahmed Von Denffer quotes Assyoti who pointed out that "the Qur'an had been written down in its entirety in the time of the prophet" (35). Denffer says that when some writers say that the Qur'an was collected and brought together in one book, they mean that they ordered its chapters or suras, and verses according to the instructions of the Prophet. Denffer explains that the prophet could not perform this project of bringing together the suras of the Qur'an during his life time because he died only "nine days after the last revelation and [he] was severely ill [at that time]" (36).

The first collection of the verses and suras of the Qur'an occurred at the time of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, who asked Zayd Ibn Thabit, a chief scribe to collect the Qur'an. Zayd collected the scattered fragments of the Qur'an recorded on palm leaves, stones, bones and animal skins. Abu Bakr, then gave this first collected text of the Qur'an to Hafsah, wife of the prophet. This first collection of the Qur'an remained with Hafsa, till the death of her father, Omar, the second caliph.

The final collection of the Suras and verses of the Qur'an at the time of the third Caliph, Othman was a big and necessary project since war and old age have claimed the lives of many of those who kept the Qur'an by heart. Othman requested Zayd Ibn Thabit to head a committee of scribes to edit and copy the collection kept by Hafsah. The committee produced the copy known as the Mus'haf of Othman which was sent to people around the Muslim world of that time. Othman ordered all other copies and fragments of the Qur'an to be destroyed.

It is important to note that this Othmanic copy of the Qur'an can be read in seven famous ways of reading, according to the dialects of seven famous Arab tribes. These seven ways of reading the Qur'an do not radically change the meanings of the verses read. They are different in some grammatical or dialectical variations.

It is also important to note that the Qur'an is intended to be read not just for the sake of reading, but also for pondering and meditation. Ali, the prophet's cousin, and the fourth Caliph said that it is not good to

read the Qur'an without thinking about its meanings. It is quoted by An-Nisaaii that the prophet kept reading and thinking about the verse "If you punish them, they are your creation, and if You forgive them, verily You, only You, are the All-Mighty, the All Wise" (5: 118). It is narrated that Omar Ibn el-Khattab memorized the second chapter of the Qur'an in a year. When asked why it took him that much time to memorize this chapter, he said that he used to memorize some verses of the chapter and he would not move to the next part unless he puts this part he memorized into practice in his life. A Muslim is requested to think about the meanings of the Qur'an and act according to its rules.

Ibn Ajiba tells us the story of Abi Sulaiman Ad-Darani who said that he used to read a verse and to spend four days thinking about it and he would go on thinking about it if he does not cut it short to move to the next verse. (88) It is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad said that "the best worship is reading and thinking about the Qur'an" (Ibn Ajiba 130). It is also narrated that "whoever reads and thinks about the Qur'an is the best of human beings" (Ibn Ajiba 130). Ibn Ajiba quotes many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which indicate that whoever reads and keeps the Qur'an by heart will be rewarded bountifully on the Day of Judgment (131, 132).

Interpretation of the Qur'an (Tafsir):

To interpret the Qur'an, from an Islamic point of view, is to try to understand its meanings so as to follow Allah's instructions and avoid His prohibitions. However, we should put in mind that we will never come to a full understanding of the Qur'an for it is intended to be an everlasting miracle which reveals some of its secrets every now and then.

In his detailed book on the interpretation of Sura Al-Fatiha, Ahmed Ibn Ajiba points out that the first interpreter of the Qur'an is the Prophet Muhammad himself. Many of the prophet's sayings interpret verses in the Qur'an. It is also said that the first interpreter of the Qur'an is Ibn Abbas. He is the first to write on the subject. Most of the later interpreters quote from his interpretation. It is also said that Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the prophet's cousin is the first interpreter of the Qur'an. Ibn Abbas himself said: 'I learned the interpretation of the Qur'an from Ali'.

An interpreter of the Qur'an should have good knowledge of the Arabic language, history, sayings of the Prophet, Jurisprudence and other subjects as well. Muslims are requested to be acquainted with this field of knowledge. It is esteemed as a great subject because it deals with the greatest of books, the Qur'an. It aims at knowing the wisdom and the rules put by Allah for the good and happiness of humanity.

Some interpreters of the Qur'an approach its words lexically. They try to understand the literal meaning of its words. Others try to understand the implications of the Qur'an. Some other interpreters try to give reasons for the revelation of specific verses in the Qur'an. The three categories of interpreters actually help in understanding the Qur'an.

The expansion of Islam both east and west since the second decade of its appearance made it necessary for Muslims to interpret the Qur'an for non-Arabs. One of the oldest interpretations of the Qur'an is the one written by Rafie Mahran Er-Riahi (died 90 After the Prophet's Higra.), Mujahid Ibn Jabr (died 101 A.H.) Ataa Ibn Abi Rabah (died 114 A. H.). (Shihata 6). Professor Abdallah Shihata categorizes the early interpreters of the Qur'an into three schools:

1) Meccans, followers of Abd-Ullah Ibn Abbas

2) Kufi (in Iraq), followers of Abd-Ullah Ibn Masoud

3) Medinians, followers of Zayd Ibn Aslam.

The most important interpreters of the Qur'an in the next generations include:

1) Muqatil Ibn Sulayman Al-Balkhi (died 150 A. H.)

2) Sufyan Ath-thawri (died 161 A. H.)

3) Wakieh son of Al-Garrah (died 197 A. H.)

4) Abdel-Razzaq Ibn Hammam As-Sanaani (died 207 A. H.)

Some of these early interpretations of the Qur'an are lost, but they are made use of by the famous Muhammad Ibn Garir At-Tabari (died 310 A. H.) in his famous and highly regarded interpretation of the Qur'an, which is so common nowadays.

Based on another criterion, interpreters of the Qur'an can be classified into two main groups. The first is that which bases its interpretation of the Qur'an on texts either of the Qur'an itself or of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. At-Tabari, Saiid Ibn Al-Musayab, Salim Ibn Abdullah belong to this group of interpreters. The other group of interpreters thought that it is possible to interpret the Qur'an on the basis of their own knowledge and logic. Shihata points out that the gap between the two groups of interpreters is not very big. An interpreter is supposed to make use of the texts when available. But when no textual evidence is available, an interpreter is supposed to use his own knowledge, mind and logic to understand the meaning of the verse. (7)

The following suras of the Qur'an were revealed to the prophet Muhammad in Mecca in the following chronological order:

1)	Al-Alaq	Sura 96
2)	Nun	68
3)	Al-Muz-Zammil	73
4)	Al-Mud-Dathir	74
5)	Al-Masad	111
6)	At-Takwir	81
7)	Al-Aalaa	87
8)	Al-Lail	92
9)	Al-Fajr	89
10)	Ad-Duha	93
11)	Ash-Sharh	94
12)	Al-Asr	17
13)	Al-Aadiat	100
14)	Al-Kawthar	108
15)	Al-Takathur	102
16)	Al-Maaoun	107
17)	Al-Kafirun	109
18)	Al-fiyl	105
19)	Al-Falaq	103
20)	An-Nas	104
21)	Al-Ekhlas	112
22)	An-Nagm	53
23)	Aabasa	80

The following suras were revealed to the prophet Muhammad in Medina in the following chronological order:

1) Al-Baquara 2
2) Al-Anfal 8
3) Al-Imran 3
4) Al-Ahzab 33
5) Al-Mumtahana 60
6) An-Nisaa 4
7) Az-Zalzala 99
8) Al-Hadid 57
9) Muhammad 47
10) Ar-Raad 13
11) Ar-Rahman 55
12) Al-Insan 76
13) At-Talaq 65
14) Al-Bayyina 98
15) Al-Hashr 59
16) An-Nasr 110
17) An-Nour 24
18) Al-Hajj 22
19) Al-Munafiqun 63
20) Al-Mujadala 58

Translating the meanings of the Qur'an:

Verse 195 of Chapter 26 of the Qur'an makes it clear that the Qur'an is revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic. It is best read and studied in its original language. However, a translation of the meanings of the Qur'an is necessary for non-Arab readers. It should be put in mind that no translation, however excellent it is, could be comprehensive and inclusive of the meanings intended in the Arabic text. It is miraculous not only in its content but in its rhetorical language as well. In prayer, a Muslim should read the parts of the Qur'an in Arabic, the Qur'an's original language.

Sura Al-Fatiha

Verse One:

﴿ بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ﴾

"In the Name of Allah, the All and Ever-Merciful, the Compassionate."

This verse begins all chapters of the Qur'an except for chapter Nine which does not start with this verse. However, it is considered as an introductory verse to the chapters except for Al-Fatiha in which it is counted as a full verse. The first verse of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad teaches us that we should start our reading of the Qur'an with the name of Allah:

﴿ ٱقْرَأْ بِٱسْمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ۝١ ﴾ [العلق]

"Read in the name of your Lord" (96:1). Being in the companionship of Allah, the reader of the Qur'an hopes to understand some of the secrets of the Qur'an. As a matter of fact, Allah teaches Muslims that they should observe His presence in all of their actions. In Sura 18, Allah establishes this principle at the hearts of Muslims. He says:

﴿ وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَاْىْءٍ إِنِّى فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا ۝٢٣ إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَٱذْكُر رَّبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلْ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَهْدِيَنِ رَبِّى لِأَقْرَبَ مِنْ هَٰذَا رَشَدًا ۝٢٤ ﴾

[الكهف]

"And never say of anything 'I shall do such a thing tomorrow except with saying if Allah will" (23-24). The fact that one will remember Allah before taking any decision will discourage him from doing evil. He will be ashamed to do wrong if he has to remember his Lord beforehand.

The word 'Allah' is unique in Arabic. It has no dual case nor does it have a plural. It has no feminine case as most nouns in Arabic do. Hence, its very morphological structure implies the oneness of Allah. The word 'Allah' refers to a concept, which is completely different from the Greco-Roman concept of God. The Greeks and Romans knew different gods for different concepts in life. They had a god of war, a goddess of nature, etc.

The word "Allah" can be divided into two words, /aala/ and /lahu/. The first word means "goes back" and the second one means "to him". The combination of the two words means that Allah is the one to whom everything goes back and relies on. The word /Allah/ also refers to the word /walaha/ in Arabic which means 'to love intensely'. It is a kind of love, which brings peace of mind to the person who feels it. Verse 28 of Sura 13 reads:

﴿ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ ٱلْقُلُوبُ ﴿٢٨﴾ ﴾ [الرعد]

"Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest". Allah encourages people to seek refuge in Him. He says:

﴿ فَفِرُّوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ﴾ [الذاريات:٥٠]

"So flee to Allah" (51: 50).

In the first verse of Sura Al-Fatiha the name 'Allah' is used to refer to the Super Being Who is worthy of being worshipped. It is the name which implies all other names and attributes of Allah.

The word 'Ar-rahman' which is translated here as 'the All and Ever Merciful' is an intensive form of the word "rahma," meaning general mercy. The word 'Rahim', translated here as the Compassionate, refers to the mercy of Allah which He exercises on people on the Day of Judgment. The first word /rahman/ is more inclusive because it refers to Allah's exercise of mercy in this life and in the After-life. It is more general than the adjective /rahim/ because it covers the good and the bad, whereas the word /rahim/ refers to Allah's mercy on the Day of Judgment which He exercises only on those who deserve it. Sheikh Tantawi Johary explains that the word /rahman/ refers to Allah's great blessings as the creation of earth and the sky and that the word /rahim/ refers to the minute and specific blessings as shaping eyelashes in a way that permits light to go through them and prevents dust from penetrating them. (26). The word /rahman/ is used only in connection with Allah, whereas the word /rahim/ may be applied to Allah and to human beings. The word /rahim/, for example, is used in verse 128 of Sura 9 to describe the Prophet Muhammad in his relationship with believers.

A Muslim is urged to praise and to thank Allah whenever he remembers any of Allah's blessings. Thanking Allah for His blessings makes a Muslim aware

of the proper use of these blessings. Whenever he remembers the blessing of sight, for example, he thanks Allah for it. He will also know that Allah can take it away any time. He should then make good use of it before it is gone. When Allah is pleased with the way a person uses the blessing, He will keep His blessings with the person and will give him more. Allah says:

﴿ وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ ۖ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ ۝ ﴾ [إبراهيم] .

"If you give thanks for my blessings, I will give you more of them, but if you are thankless, then I may send My wrath on You" (14: 7). A Muslim knows that all the blessings he enjoys are from Allah. In sura 16, verse 53 Allah says:

﴿ وَمَا بِكُم مِّن نِّعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ ٱللَّهِ ﴾ [النحل: ٥٣]

"And whatever of blessings and good things you have, it is from Allah".

Verse Two:

﴿ ٱلۡحَمۡدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ﴾

"All praise and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of all beings."

The word /hamdu/ is derived from the verb /hamada/ which implies thanking combined with praise. Az-Zamakhshari explains that the word /hamada/ includes both praise which is a verbal expression of gratitude and thanking which is more general. It can be verbal or otherwise (Vol.1: 45). On knowing that Allah is merciful and loving, a Muslim praises Allah and thanks him for being so kind to him. Prophet Muhammad explains that a Muslim's situation is unique. If he is debilitated, he puts up with it and if he is pleased, he thanks Allah. Allah rewards such a Muslim in both cases. A Muslim's praise of Allah is a source of great mercy for those who pronounce it with sincerity. The word /hamdu/ is preceded with the definitive article /al/ to mean that all praise is due to Allah, for He is the real and original benefactor in life. Johary explains that it was a common habit among Arabs, especially poets, to praise kings and chiefs of tribes. This habit resulted in so many wars and led to hypocrisy and to prejudice. The verse explains that all praise is due to Allah for he is the real originator of all graces. Islam frees Man from enslavement to his fellowmen (33-35). A Muslim believes that all blessings are from Allah. He is the One to praise for all the graces we enjoy. However, Allah requests that a person should thank whoever does him a

favor. The prophet narrates that Allah says: 'He did not thank Me who does not thank the person who does him a favor'. This person is the means through which Allah sent His blessing.

According to Al-Kalbi, a good Muslim should thank Allah not only for the blessings he enjoys, but also for the general blessings Allah bestows on human beings at large. Al-Kalbi explains that thanking Allah for His graces can be divided into three kinds: The first kind is thanking Allah for His favors. The second kind is thanking Allah for the graces and for the hardships of life. If a Muslim bears well the sufferings of this life, he will be bountifully rewarded by Allah in the After-life. The third kind of thanking Allah, from Al-Kalbi's point of view, is that for helping a person reach the condition of absorption in the love of Allah. He then becomes aware of nothing but the companionship of his Creator. He feels this companionship as the blessing of all blessings. A person who reaches this high stage of thanking Allah becomes more of a condition or a state than of a being (Vol. 1: 32).

To praise Allah sincerely, a Muslim needs to know about the power of Allah through studying His creation. Johary explains that a Muslim should know about the different aspects of human life to be really able to appreciate Allah's power and mercy. He points out that unless Muslims study the natural phenomena, they will not be able to value Allah's creation. Without real appreciation of Allah's power and magnificence, a Muslim's belief will be incomplete.

According to Sura Al-Fatiha, a person praises and thanks Allah mainly for two major kinds of blessings. The first is that of creating the world around him, which makes him aware of Allah's power. Sura 6 starts with:

﴿ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ وَٱلنُّورَ ﴾ [الأنعام: ١]

"All Praise and thanks be to Allah, Who (Alone) created the heavens and the earth, and originated the darkness and the light". Sura 35 also starts with:

﴿ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ﴾ [فاطر: ١]

"All praise and thanks be to Allah, the (only) originator (or creator) of the heavens and the earth". The other major kind of blessings mentioned in Sura Al-Fatiha, is Allah's revelation of Himself to us through telling us about His attributes and qualities. The last verse of Sura 17 reads:

﴿ وَقُلِ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِى لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ شَرِيكٌ فِى ٱلْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ وَلِىٌّ مِّنَ ٱلذُّلِّ وَكَبِّرْهُ تَكْبِيرًۢا ﴿١١١﴾ ﴾ [الإسراء]

"And Say: 'All the praises and thanks be to Allah, Who has not begotten a son (nor an offspring), and Who has no partner in His Dominion, nor is He low to have a helper or supporter. Glorify Him with all the magnificence". The next verse, which starts Sura 18 reads:

﴿ ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَلَمْ يَجْعَل لَّهُۥ عِوَجَا ۜ ﴿١﴾ ﴾ [الكهف]

"All the praise and thanks be to Allah, Who has revealed His uncomplicated Book, the Qur'an to His Prophet Muhammad". The Qur'an is the medium through which Allah revealed Himself to us.

The phrase /rubb-il-aalamin/ ﴿ رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴾

which is translated as "the Lord of all beings" has the implications of being the Creator, Owner, Sustainer, and Provider of the world. However, the word /rubb/ in Arabic has more implications than the word 'Lord' in English. It implies reference to the one who takes care of his family both morally and financially. In his remarkable interpretation of Sura Al-Fatiha, Johary points out the relationship between the word /rabb/ and the verb /rabba/ which means 'develop', 'breed', 'bring up' and 'grow'. This relationship between the two words shows connotations of mercy in the word /rubb/ (42). Johary gives the examples of wheat, corn and dates to explain how Allah magnificently puts life into the seeds and cultivates them into whole plants (43). The same power applies to all kinds of creation. Johary also gives the growth of a human being as a manifestation of Allah's power, which develops and brings up a human being from a sperm and an egg to a grown up being.

Ash-Sharawi explains that the word /rubb/ or Lord implies power and authority. Hence, Allah followed this verse with the two attributes, 'All and Ever-Merciful' and 'Compassionate', which imply mercy and love (50). It is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad said Allah will

greatly reward whoever says: 'All praise be to Allah, the Lord of all beings' with sincerity. He will even be more rewarded for saying this statement than for pronouncing the statement of monotheism. The statement of praise and thanks implies admission of the statement of monotheism. It includes praise and thanks in addition to the monotheistic statement (Ibn Ajiba 624). In his presentation of Abil-Kalam Aazad's Urdu interpretation of Sura Al-Fatiha Ihab H. Ezzel-Arab points out that the phrase /rabbil-Aalamin/, Lord of all beings, indicates that Allah is fair to All. He treats people equally. A Muslim does not believe in the idea of a chosen people. Muslims believe that Allah does not favor any race or nation more than another. (1685).

In his discussion of this verse, Sayyid Qutb compares this Islamic conception of the word 'Allah' with the Aristotelian conception of God. Aristotle, according to Qutb, says that the Supreme God created the world, then, left it alone. This Supreme Being thought that he should not care about things below his own being (23). The Qur'an, on the other hand, starts with describing Allah as a loving and merciful Supreme Being, so that a reader will willingly accept Allah's instructions in the Qur'an. A Muslim thanks Allah for enlightening him about His Being and for freeing him of the confusing ideas about God, which dominated the world before Islam. It frees him of the mythological and illusionary conceptions of terrifying and revengeful gods, which were common in the Greek and Roman cultures.

A Muslim's conception of a loving and merciful Supreme Being makes him aware of Allah's subjugation of the natural elements for the benefit of Man. A Muslim does not fear such natural elements and phenomena, as did the Greeks and the Romans. He loves these elements, as they are the creation of the same loving Super Being who created him. A Muslim considers these natural elements as blessings from Allah. Sura 14 speaks about the subjugation of these natural elements for the service of Man. Verses 32 and 33 of the same sura go as follows:

﴿ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَأَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً
فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلْفُلْكَ لِتَجْرِىَ فِى
ٱلْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِۦ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلْأَنْهَٰرَ (٣٢) وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلشَّمْسَ وَٱلْقَمَرَ
دَآئِبَيْنِ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلَّيْلَ وَٱلنَّهَارَ (٣٣) ﴾ [إبراهيم]

Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and sent water down from heaven, so He brought out with it so many products for your provision. And to you He subjugated ships to run in the sea at His command and He subjugated the rivers to you (32). And He subjugated the sun and the moon, both in a steadfast manner, and to you He subjugated the night and the day (33).

Allah speaks of the subjugation of these natural phenomena as a blessing to Man. Verse 34 of the same sura reads:

﴿ وَءَاتَىٰكُم مِّن كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ ۚ وَإِن تَعُدُّوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَآ ۗ إِنَّ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ ﴿٣٤﴾ ﴾ [إبراهيم]

"And He gave you all that you asked Him for, and if you count the blessings of Allah, never will you be able to comprehend them". Sayyid Qutb quotes the Prophet Muhammad's words, which refer to Mount Ohud in Mecca when he says: "This is a mountain that loves us and that we love" (24). It is a loving relationship, which brings peace and security to human life.

Verse Three:

﴿ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ ۝ ﴾

"The All and Ever merciful , the Compassionate."

When Allah describes Himself in verse two as the Lord of the Worlds, He, soon, wants to make people feel at ease when he describes Himself in the third verse as the 'All and Ever-Merciful', 'the Compassionate'. According to Ash-Shaarawi, these attributes of Allah do not express different degrees of mercy. Each of Allah's attributes represents its ultimate quality. The two attributes are different attributes rather than different degrees of the same attribute (48). These two attributes are used here to help a person overcome his feelings of guilt in case he has sinned against Allah. Allah is merciful even to the sinners and disbelievers. He sustains them and keeps them alive. This verse implants hope in sinners.

It is narrated that some of the creations of Allah like earth and the skies will be dissatisfied with Man's sins. They will ask Allah to send them for the destruction of sinners. Allah, mercifully, will calm them down and say that Man is His own creation and He will take care of him. He corrects them: "If you had created Man, you would have been merciful to him. If Man repents, he will be in My company and if he does not repent, I will be his Healer" (Shaarawi 61).

Shihata explains that the attribute 'Ar-rahman' means that Allah is merciful in himself and that mercy is

part of His being. The attribute "Ar-Rahim" refers to the application of this attribute of mercy to His creation. The relationship between the two attributes of /Rahman/ and /Rahim/ according to Shihata is similar to the relationship between the two attiributes "rich" and "generous". The word "rich" refers to the existence of the quality of having much money. The attiribute "generous" extends the attribute of being "rich" to others (13). This conception of a loving and merciful God, is different from The Greek and Roman conception of revengeful and resentful gods. Muhammad Hisham Ed-Dieb says that the two attributes Ar-rahman and Ar-rahim refer to Allah's mercy when he sent his Prophet Muhammad to human beings (16).

Sayyid Qutb explains that we, as readers, should not very much concern ourselves with the difference between the two attributes /Ar-rahman/ and /Ar-rahim/. It is sufficient to know that the two attributes cover all kinds and aspects of mercy in both this and the After-life (24). Allah's emphasis on the attributes of mercy in this first chapter of the Qur'an reminds us of His loving nature. In so many of his sayings, Allah indicates that His mercy precedes His anger.

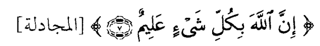
Ar-Razi explains that when a reader uses one of the attributes of Allah in his prayers, he implicitly asks Allah to exercise this attribute on him. When, for example, he says 'O, Allah, you are the All and Ever-Merciful', he implicitly asks Allah to exercise His mercy on him and so is the case with all other names and qualities of Allah (Vol. 1: 128).

Verse Four:

﴿ مَٰلِكِ يَوۡمِ ٱلدِّينِ ۝٤ ﴾

"Master and Possessor of the Day of Judgment."

The word /maaliki/ which means 'possessor' in Arabic is read by some readers of the Qur'an as /maliki/ to mean "king" of the Day of Judgment. However, both readings are acceptable. The meaning of the word as 'possessor' is said to be more effective than the meaning of the word as 'king'. A possessor has direct right to the thing possessed whereas a king is like a protector of such things and of peace among possessors in his kingdom. On the other hand, it is said that a king has more power than a possessor. Hence, the two readings are acceptable. It is better to think of Allah as both the only king and the sole possessor of the Day of Judgment. On that day, Allah will ask: "Who is then the Lord?" The answer will then come from Him "Allah is the only Lord". When a sinner knows that there is punishment on the Day of Judgment, he will correct himself in this life. A good person will be encouraged to act properly when he knows that he will be rewarded on the Day of Judgment. Such an observation of Allah's mercy and power is more effective than the secular system in which a person fears the legal punishment and is ready to make mistakes in the absence of the law. A Muslim realizes that Allah knows all about him for He is the Omniscient (Qur'an 58: 7).



Though Allah is the 'Ever Possessor' of all the worlds, yet He mentions His possession of the Day of Judgment specifically because of its magnitude and because He is the Sole Possessor of that Day. The horror of the Day of Judgment is referred to in many verses in different suras of the Qur'an. In Sura 22, for example, the first two verses read:

O Mankind, fear your Lord and be dutiful to Him! Verily, the earthquake of the Hour of Judgment is a terrible thing. The Day you shall see it, every nursing mother will forget her nursling and every pregnant one will drop her load, and you shall see mankind as in a drunken state, yet they will not be drunken, but severe will be the [situation with sinners].

A Muslim's belief in the Day of Judgment and his fear of punishment free him of enslavement to his own desire to sin. He knows that he will be held responsible for his deeds. This belief will also free him of enslavement to others. He will know that this short life is incomparable with the everlasting one that follows resurrection. He will then be in control of his wishes and desires. He will be ready to sacrifice the pleasures of this life for the happiness and pleasures of the everlasting life thereafter. He will not kill, nor steal nor commit adultery for fear of punishment on the Day of Judgment. Such an attitude will establish peace and safety in the world.

Verse Five:

﴿ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾ ﴾

"You only do we worship, and You only do we beseech for help."

Here is a change of the grammatical case from the third person case in the last four verses to the second person case in the remaining three verses. This implies a realization of the propinquity and nearness of Allah that a person feels his presence. The reader, thus, addresses Allah directly saying: "You only do we worship...." The sentence starts with the object "You" rather than with the subject 'we' because of the superiority of the pronoun 'You', which refers to Allah. Inversion here, is a rhetorical device in Arabic, which implies confinement, meaning that Muslims worship Allah and none else.

From an Islamic point of view, Man is created mainly for the purpose of worshipping Allah, which implies correction of his life. The word worship in Arabic /naabudu/ implies not just the performance of certain rites, but this performance has to have some effect on the personality of the individual. It purifies his character and negates all aspects of arrogance in his personality. Sensations of fear, love, hope, submission and humility are all included in the Arabic word /naabudu/ which is translated into 'worship.' Verse 56 of Sura 51 reads:

﴿ وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾ ﴾ [الذاريات]

"And in no way did I create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me". A Muslim's relationship to Allah is not that of enslavement in the common sense of the word. It is, rather, a relationship of love. It is a relationship, which leaves Man with more freedom than restraint. He frees himself from enslavement to all other aspects of life except that of attachment to Allah. However, this attachment to Allah does not mean hermitage. A Muslim is requested to be an active member of his society. When Omar Ibn El-Khattab saw a man praying most of the day in the mosque, he asked about the person who pays for his living. When Omar was told that the man's brother supports him, the Caliph said: 'His brother is closer to Allah than this man is'. It is also narrated that three men came to the Prophet Muhammad and the first of them said to the prophet 'I pray all night'. The second man said: 'I fast all day'. The third man said: 'I keep aloof from women'. The Prophet Muhammad finally said: 'I am the most pious of you and I pray and sleep during the night. I fast and break my fast. I marry women. Whoever takes things to extremes does not follow my way.

When a Muslim knows some of the qualities and attributes of Allah, he then comes to the conclusion that Allah alone is worthy of worship and He is the One to ask for help.

The second part of the verse is necessary for the completion of the idea mentioned in the first part. The fact that we have decided to worship Allah may imply that we

have become so good. This may inflate man's feelings of pride and self-conceit. The second part implies that a Muslim's devoutness and piety is a gift from Allah. We can do our prayers properly only when Allah helps us. We beseech Allah to help us worship Him because it is for our own good. This attachment to Allah is completely different from an attachment to a boss at work or to a landlord. Enslavement to a human being brings the benefits of the relationship to the master or the owner. On the other hand, enslavement to Allah brings the benefits of the relationship to human beings. Attachment to Allah brings confidence and freedom to Man. He starts to realize that Allah is the Almighty and the most powerful Being. Ash-Shaarawi points out that it is a unique relationship in which the master presents Himself to the slave. It is a master-slave relationship in which the tables are turned. It is a relationship in which the master attends willingly to the needs of his slaves (74). Allah says in the Qur'an:

﴿ وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِى عَنِّى فَإِنِّى قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ ٱلدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِى وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾ ﴾ [البقرة].

"I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor)" (2: 186). This state of slavery to Allah is a sublime state. Allah speaks of the Prophet Muhammad as his 'slave' in the sublime situation of the prophet's ascendance to heaven. Allah says in the Qur'an:

﴿ سُبۡحَٰنَ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَسۡرَىٰ بِعَبۡدِهِۦ لَيۡلٗا مِّنَ ٱلۡمَسۡجِدِ ٱلۡحَرَامِ إِلَى ٱلۡمَسۡجِدِ ٱلۡأَقۡصَا ﴾ [الإسراء: ١]

"Glorified be Allah who took His slave (Muhammad) for a journey by night from Al-Masjid-al-Haram (in Mecca) to Al-Aqsa mosque (in Jerusalem)" (17: 1). The first words of Jesus as a baby, according to the Qur'an were

﴿ قَالَ إِنِّي عَبۡدُ ٱللَّهِ ءَاتَىٰنِيَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيّٗا ﴿٣٠﴾ ﴾ [مريم]

"I am a slave of Allah, He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet" (19: 30).

It is important to notice that Allah preceded asking for help with the actual worship to point out that we need to start with the actual worship before we ask for help. A person needs to take action first then he asks for support.

It is also worthnoting here that the pronoun used in the verse is "we" not "I". This observation implies reference to the fact that most of Muslim religious rites are collective works of worship. Muslims are told that people who loved each other in life will be in company of each other in the After-life. Hence, they are requested to be in company of good people so that they accompany them in Paradise. Besides, the companionship of good people will help us be good. Birds of one feather, as the saying goes, flock together. A Muslim, according to the verse, is supposed to supplicate to Allah for the good of his companions as well as for all others. Allah's blessings fall upon all who are gathered in a good spiritual and sacred

meeting. When a Muslim prays for others, he actually protects himself against other members of society. When all the members of a society are good, individuals feel safe and pleased.

In his interpretation of Sura Al-Fatiha, Ar-Razi explains that we should worship Allah for His being our merciful Lord, not for aspiration to go to paradise or for fear of hell. If we worship Allah, only in order to go to paradise, we actually use our worship of Allah as a medium to gain pleasure in paradise. We would actually be worshippers of paradise. In such a case, a person would take any way, which will lead him to paradise if he would find it.

A Muslim asks Allah for help to be able to properly worship Him. This indicates that worshipping Allah is for the benefit of the worshipper. It is not for the benefit of Allah. A Muslim is held responsible for his deeds. His own work redeems him and saves him the punishment on the Day of Judgment.

Verse six:

﴿ ٱهْدِنَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝ ﴾

"Guide us to and keep us on the right way."

After a Muslim's attestation to the oneness, mercy and power of Allah, he is requested to ask Allah for guidance. A Muslim is then prepared and qualified for guidance. He asks for the straightforward way to the proper worship of Allah. This verse is an explanation of the help requested in the previous verse. (Al-Baydawy Vol.1: 3). In his interpretation of the Qur'an, Abus-Soud quotes Ali Ibn Abi Talib's explanation of the word /ihdina/ or guide us to mean 'keep us committed and dedicated to your religion. This interpretation, probably explains why a good Muslim reads this verse over and over again in his prayers. (Vol. 1: 1). He needs to be committed and devoted to the religion of Allah.

Commentators explain that "the straight way" is the Book of Allah. The second verse of the next chapter of the Qur'an says:

This is the Book (The Qur'an) whereof there is no doubt, a guidance to the pious and the righteous people who fear Allah and abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which He has forbidden. They also love Him and perform all kinds of good deeds, which He has ordained.

Those pious people are described in the verses, which follow this second verse of Chapter two. They are

described as being on "true guidance from their Lord, and they are the good doers." (2: 5)

﴿ أُوْلَـٰٓئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ ۖ وَأُوْلَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥﴾ ﴾

[البقرة]

Allah will protect those whom He loves. It is narrated by Zayd Ibn Amr Ibn Nugail, that the Prophet Muhammad was offered meat by some idolaters before the reception of his revelation. The prophet did not eat from the meat on which the names of the idols were mentioned. It is also narrated that young Muhammad was in the company of some youth from Quraish, his tribe, when they went to a party in which wine was served. Muhammad fell into sound sleep. Allah wanted to protect him from such unwanted sins, even before his mission. 'The right way' is also interpreted as the way of the Prophet Muhammad. Allah says in the Qur'an:

﴿ وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا ۚ مَا كُنتَ تَدْرِى مَا ٱلْكِتَـٰبُ وَلَا ٱلْإِيمَـٰنُ وَلَـٰكِن جَعَلْنَـٰهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِى بِهِۦ مَن نَّشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ۚ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِىٓ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٢﴾ ﴾ [الشورى]

And thus We have sent to you (O Muhammad) an inspiration and a Mercy of Our Command. You knew not what is the Book, nor what is Faith? But We have made it (this Qur'an) a light wherewith We guide whosoever of Our slaves We will. And Verily,

you (O Muhammad) are indeed guiding (mankind) to the Straight Path (i.e. Allah's religion of Islamic Monotheism)" (42:52).

According to Muslims, the 'right way' is the way of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. It is the way, which is determined by the Qur'an. Aisha, wife of the Prophet Muhammad said that the Prophet was an incarnation of the morals mentioned in the Qur'an.

Verse Seven:

﴿ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ غَيۡرِ ٱلۡمَغۡضُوبِ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ﴾

"The way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your Grace and Favors, not of those who have incurred Your wrath or those who have gone astray."

The ones upon whom Allah has bestowed his favors according to the religion of Islam are the righteous and the truthful. They are interpreted by Abus-Soud as the prophets of past nations. (Vol. 1:1) According to Al-Baghawi, the blessed people are the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Vol.1: 37). Ar-Razi explains: "those who have incurred Allah's wrath are the disobedient and those who have gone astray are the nonbelievers" (Vol.1: 154, 210).

In Chapter Sixteen of the Qur'an, Allah refers to those who have gone astray saying: "They will bear their own burdens in full on the Day of Resurrection, and also the burdens of those whom they misled. Evil indeed is that which they shall bear" (25). Those who have gone astray are those who knew truth and ignored it. Such people are mistaken in their judgments. They are blinded to the truth and they are lost in the darkness of their blindness. A Muslim prays that Allah will keep him committed to the way of Islam, and away from that of the disbelievers and

hypocrites. In the Qur'an, Allah mentions that He does not guide those who chose to be disbelievers (16: 107), disobedient (5: 108) and unjust (2:258).

Allah's blessings and graces to Man are uncountable, but in this life they are either physical or nonphysical. The physical graces are like health. The non-physical blessings are like knowledge. According to Al-Kalbi, Allah will also exercise His blessings and graces on us on the Day of Judgment (Vol.1: 32). This positive concept of the Divine Being encourages individuals to get closer to Allah, their loving protector.

آمين

This word means 'O God, respond positively to me and accept my prayers and supplications'. This concluding part is not part of the sura. However, Muslims are recommended to say 'Amen' after the supplication, which ends this short sura. The Prophet Muhammad was quoted as saying: "When you hear the last verse of the Fatiha, you should say 'Amen' for when the angels hear the verse, they say 'Amen' (Al-Bukhari Vol.6 Hadith No.2). The sura ends with supplication to Allah to guide all human beings to righteousness and truthfulness. It is a short sura that sums up the whole Qur'an and deals with all the basics of the religion of Islam.

Notes

1) When a quotation is taken from the Qur'an, the first number refers to the number of the chapter or sura and the second number refers to the number of the verse.

The following translations of the meanings of the Qur'an are used in this book:

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1) Abdallah Shihata.
2) Abus-Soud.
3) Al-Baghawi.
4) Al-Baydawy.
5) Al-Kalbi.
6) Al-Qurtobi.
7) Ar-Razi.
8) As-Syoti.
9) Ath-Thaalibi.
10) At-Tabari.
11) Az-Zamakh'shari.
12) Eigaz El-Qur'an.
13) Esh-Shaarawi.
14) Fat'hel-Qadir.
15) Ibn Kathir.
16) Sayyid Qutb.
17) Yusuf Ali.

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